# FAIRY TALE PATTERNS IN THE POETRY OF CEZAR BALTAG

**Ana-Maria Baciu**
**PhD. student, „1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia**

*Abstract:In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), Freud argues that civilization was necessarily and tragically built on the suppression and sublimation of instinct. Cezar Baltag's world is one of conflicts he does not come to terms with, for which the poet finds no answers in a world of limits and limitations, hence his need to escape in his wandering for answers, in his quest for identity, into another one without limits, finality, closure. A deconstruction of the world, of reality, into fairy tales and into poems. He used fairy tales to project another world, one of psychological depth,without borders,a locus for his deep meanings to take roots, a world set free of constraints,of limits and limitations. The fertile ground of fairy tales was wisely used by Baltag in his poetry, with conscious intent, he entitled or subtitled some of his poems -pattern de basm/fairy tale pattern- taking his readers into a realm of multiple meanings.*

*Keywords: poetry, culture, fairy tales, myths, identity, collective imaginary*

Cezar Baltag creates a lyric universe in which the mystical bonds between the material and the spiritual worlds need to be retied. The poet considers that it is necessary to follow his ancestors, to return to the roots, to folklore in order to re-create the broken bonds. The approach is rather intellectual combining ancient spells, formulas taken from children`s folklore, characters taken from the Greek mythology, characters from the Judeo-Christian mythology. The solution sought is one formula of re-charming the world in order to keep the mystery of existence alive. There seem to be more ways to re-create the broken bond between heaven and earth: mythology, folklore, sensuality, spells, religion, poetry, etc.

Baltag's reliance on fairy tales is clearly seen in his volumes *Odihnă în ţipăt*, *Madona din dud*, *Unicorn în oglindă*, *Dialog la mal,* as it becomes a major theme throughout his entire work, a means of internal liberation in a process of self-recognition. Depicting the rural and its realm, fairy tales become cultural documents he takes into account in his poetry. With the help of fairy tales he projected another world in his poems, one of psychological depth, the only one in which he could set himself free of all constraints, including political ones.

In an interview dating back to 1971, Cezar Baltag confessed: "M-am apropiat de folclor şi pentru faptul că, în mod paradoxal, aprofundarea lui contrazice părerea comuna despre simplitate." ("Another reason for which I turned to folklore is that, paradoxically, its in-depth study contradicts the common belief about simplicity.") He turns to folklore, investigating thus in the collective subconscious, using what he calls "pattern de basm" (fairy-tale pattern), creating his own fairy tales. With "pattern de basm" as a title or subtitle for some of his poems collected in the volume *Unicorn în oglinda*, he indicates from the very beginning the way the poem should be approached, as a fairy tale - which is a specific way for our people, and not only, to understand the world, its essence. Lost in the reflections of the mirror and of poetry, the poet looks for identity, for his true, inner self caught in a conflicting world, aware of its faults and also of the passage of time. He becomes a stranger in the outer world where he finds no answers to his questions, thus, he moves his quest inwards.

Rooted in fairy tales, some of his poems are a way of re-charming the world, of finding its essence; such a poem is *Fata din dafin (The Girl in the Bay Tree)* included in the collection *Unicorn în oglină (Unicorn in the Looking Glass):*



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| | |
|---|---|
| *Fata din dafin* | *The Girl in the Bay Tree* |
| *”Ea trece ca o corabie* | *She sails like a ship* |
| *cu catargele evaporate* | *with no masts* |
| *naufragiază pe o mare de camfor* | *she sails on a a sea of camphor* |
| *de unde* | *from where* |
| *nu se mai poate* | *she can no longer* |
| *întoarce* | *return* |
| | |
| *Nervii ei sunt raze, inima ei* | *Her veins are sunrays, her heart* |
| *e un nod de lemn* | *a crux of wood* |
| *împrejurul ei e o secetă* | *around her is dryness* |
| *înăuntrul ei o fântână.* | *within her a well.* |
| *În fântână doarme un şarpe.* | *The well is nesting a snake.* |
| *Din fruntea şarpelui curge o stea.* | *The snake has a star on its head.* |
| | |
| *Ea aude cântând cocoşii* | *She hears the song of roosters* |
| *departe* | *far away* |
| *în scoarţa copacilor* | *in the trees* |
| *Auzul ei e o iederă* | *Her hearing an ivy* |
| *genele ei foşnesc* | *her lashes a rustling* |
| *ea aprinde o gură de frunze* | *her mouth just leafs* |
| *vorbele ei sunt vrăbii:* | *her words are sparrows:* |
| *Deschide-te, Dafine, deschide-te,* | |
| *Dafine, deschide-te,* | *Open-up, Bay tree, open-up Bay tree, open-up,* |
| *Dafine* | *Baytree* |
| | |
| *Dar Dafinul nu o mai aude* | |



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*Bay tree hears her no more*

*Şi ea trece ca o corabie*
*cu pânzele evaporate*
*naufragiază pe o mare de camfor*
*de unde*
*nu se mai poate*
*întoarce"* (Baltag 1975: 35)

*She sails like a ship*
*with no masts*
*she sails on a a sea of camphor*
*from where*
*she can no longer*
*return* (my translation)

The girl from the bay tree, a fairy tale character, by coming out from the bay tree and descending into the real world looses her way back to her magic world. The impossibility of return shows the rupture between the two worlds. The symbols associated with her have sacred meanings : *the ship* (corabia) – Noah's arch, a symbol of salvation, *the rays* (razele) – light as a sign of knowledge, *the wood* (lemnul) – stands for warmth, life, *the well* (fântâna) - is a representation of wisdom, *the snake* (şarpele) – a dual symbol, able to reveal wisdom, *the roosters* (cocoşii) – stand for the passage of time, the coming of morning, warning the girl it is time for her to return to her magic world.

Another poem entitled *In illo tempore,* inthe same collection of poems, is subtitled *pattern de basm (fairy-tale pattern):*

*In Illo Tempore*
*„Unde*
*timpul şi numele*

*Într-o zi*
*cît alţii într-un an*
*Şi dacă văzu că nu are încotro:*

*–Mă duc eu, tată*
*Şi plesni de trei ori din palme*

*In Illo Tempore*
*Where*
*the time and the name*

*One day*
*as others in a year*
*And seeing no other way:*

*- I will go, father*
*And clapped three times*



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| *şi se prefăcu…* | *and turned into…* |
| *- Să mă scoţi la lumea albă…* | *- Take me out into the Sun…* |
| *ca vîntul ca gîndul* | *like the wind like a thought* |
| *– Ia te uită înapoi, frate* | *- Look behind, my brother* |
| *şi spune-mi ce vezi…* | *tell me what you see…* |
| | |
| *- Doamne, dar greu somn* | *- God, deep sleep* |
| *am mai* | *did I* |
| *dormit* | *sleep* |
| | |
| *cu totul şi cu totul de aur* | *where everything was gold* |
| *Iar eu am încălecat pe o şa* | *And so my story ends* |
| *şi v-am spus"* (Baltag 1975: 113) | *as told* (my translation) |

This poem is a fairy tale itself. The title sets the action *in illo tempore*, where everything is possible, where, without *time and name,* evrything is reduced to its essence, to true knowledge. It keeps with the fairy tale frame, beginning *in illo tempore* and ending with the fairy tale formula *"Iar eu am încălecat pe o şa/ şi v-am spus //"* leaving the reader to reflect upon its content and share its meanings.

Another re-working of the fairy tale is the poem *La Pod (At the Bridge):*

| | |
|---|---|
| *La pod* | *At the Bridge* |
| *„Tată* | *Father* |
| *de atâtea ori visat* | *so many times dreamt* |
| *de atâtea ori uitat* | *so many times forgotten* |
| | |
| *iar te depărtezi* | *you go away* |



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|---|---|
| *iar te apropii* | *you come again* |
| *Ai trecut de mine* | *You passed by me* |
| *rămâi în urmă* | *you stay behind* |
| *îţi schimbi înfăţişarea* | *you change your looks* |
| *o iei pe un drum ascuns* | *you go around another way* |
| *şi iar* | *then again* |
| *îmi ieşi înainte la pod* | *come before me at the bridge* |
| *mereu îmi ieşi înainte* | *always before me* |
| *ca să mă sperii* | *to scare me* |
| *şi să pot trece* | *so to pass* |
| *de pragul în flăcări* | *the treshold in flames* |
| *al basmului"* | *of the tales* (my translation) |

We have here the image of the father as the one who helps the son in his struggle of becoming. Metamorphosis and the fluidity of time and space help the hero on his way. The brige is not only one as it appears in *Harap Alb* (*The White Moor*), but different stages on the way towards true knowledge. The passage into the world of fairy tales is represented by fire, a symbol of change, of renewal.

His collection of poems entitled *Unicorn în oglindă/Unicorn in the Looking Glass* is magic. Its vision, metaphors, music, all refer to metaphysics, selfreflexivity and the process of becoming. The self, identity, become relative concepts reflected in a multitude of mirrors. A dissolving of the subject seen as centre of the world and a progression towards a relative self that knows it is a relative self, a proliferation of roles.



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Trapped in a deceitful reality, which offers no answers, no meanings, the poet engages in a different search, an inner one.

His poem *De la capăt (From the Beginning)* included also in *Dialog la mal* (Dialogue on the Bank) is an *ars poetica*:

| | |
|---|---|
| *De la capăt* | *From the Beginning* |
| *"Ştia că are chip şi nu-l mai găsea* | *He knew he has a face and he couldn't find it* |
| *şi nu-şi mai găsea nici mâinile* | *and he couldn't fiind his hands either* |
| *cu care să-l caute* | *to look for his face* |
| *Ştia că are ochi* | *He knew he had eyes* |
| *Şi nu-i mai găsea* | *And he couldn't find them* |
| *şi nu-şi mai găsea nici pleoapele* | *he couldn't fiind his eyelids either* |
| *care să-l apere* | *to protect him* |
| *Ştia că are un drum* | *He knew about his way* |
| *şi nu-l mai găsea* | *and he couldn't find it* |
| *şi nu-şi mai găsea nici tălpile* | *he couldn't find his soles either* |
| *cu care să-l caute* | *to look for it* |
| | |
| *Atunci şi-a auzit inima* | *Then he heard his heart* |
| *înăuntrul unei fântâni* | *within a well* |
| *şi-a coborât înăuntrul ei* | *and went down in* |
| *şi şi-a recâştigat calul şi spada* | *regained his horse and sword* |
| *Ca fulgerul* | *A lightening pouring* |
| *într-un ulcior celest* | *from a divine pot* |
| *Ca bobul de grâu care se trezeşte în pământ* | *A grain that germinates the earth* |
| *şi îşi reaminteşte dintr-o dată* | *and suddenly remembers* |
| *de la capăt* | *from the beginning* |
| *toată povestea"* | *the entire story* (my translation) |



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This poem is a Deleuzian becoming animal, that is, a body of matter and energy, where there are no specialized tissues for separate organs – in other words, a formless mass prior to symbolization. Prince Charming, the archetypal hero, is seeking for his face (recognizable form) and for his organs (eyes, hands, soles) which are being formed as a sort of materialization of his desire. He wishes them into being, he imagines them into being. His becoming mimics Creation (*A lightening pouring/from a divine pot).* The supreme form of existence is the narrative of one's own life, the territorialization of material reality into a book.

By deconstructing reality, his poems become a locus for the spiritual search of meanings, of identity, he builds his own imaginary world to resolve his conflicts and answer his questions. He uses his poetry to interpret and elucidate existence, his poems become a verbal organizing corresponding to a spiritual content: *"Cuvântul este principiul verbal suprem ce susţine 'toate lumile'"* (Baltag 1996:7) ("The word is the ultimate verbal element at the basis of 'all possible worlds'") argued Cezar Baltag in *Paradoxul semnelor* , connecting it to the Bible and its *„La început a fost Cuvântul şi Cuvântul era la Dumnezeu şi Cuvântul era Dumnezeu."* (At the beginning there was the Word and the Word belonged to God and the Word was God.") his search for words is also a a search for God, for identity and since God resides inside us, his search is an inner one, into the depths of his being, away from the external world of representation as stated in his poem *Ocultare* from the volume *Chemarea numelui:*

*"Pur? Aventura ia sfârşit*
*o dată*
*cu puritatea.*
*Îngerul n-aşteaptă.*
*De nu l-ai înfruntat la prima treaptă*
*urci şi tot urci o scară de nămol*
*şi nu mai întâlneşti nici un simbol*

*Să fie-o uşă, poate, în ne-gând*
*un prag mai aspru*
*un zăvor mai sfânt*
*şi dincolo de pragul ei curat*
*să fie chipul tău adevărat?*

*Cuvintele s-ar stinge dacă-n rugă*
*n-ar fi atrase de un punct de fugă,*
*acolo în adânc*
*tăcerea arde*
*şi Dumnezeu în toate se împarte*
*şi ca-n oglindă*
*dincolo de lume*
*El brusc îşi stinge ultimul lui Nume*
*Orbim*
*şi facem calea înapoi*
*şi nu mai ştim că l-am ascuns în noi*

*Pure? The adventure is over*
*once*
*with purity.*
*The Angel waits no more.*
*If not confronted at the start*
*you climb and climb a a stair of mud*
*no symbol in your way*

*A door,*
*maybe, not in the thought*
*a stronger hold*
*a holier bolt*
*and beyond its treshold*
*might your true face be hold?*

*The words would dissappear*
*if they were not connected in a prayer*
*deep there*
*the silence burning*
*and God is everywhere*
*and like in mirror*
*beyond the world*
*He suddenly silences his Name*
*We see no more*
*and back we go*
*forgetting we have Him in us hidden*



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| *În jarul* | *In burning* |
| *şi cenuşa din cuvinte* | *truthful words* |
| *mă-îngroapă, Doamne, să te pot aprind* | *you lost me, God, so I can speak of you* |
| (Baltag 1995:20) | (my translation) |

The poet himself is a creator of worlds through words, and the poem a use of words for deeper meanings. In his process of creation he uses not only words but also their music, as seen in his volume *Madona din dud,* so muchimbued with folklore, when words where sung, becoming more than just words. We can well place this volume next to Ion Barbu's *Isarlâc*, Tudor Arghezi's *Flori de mucegai* or Anton Pann's writings.

With his appeal to folklore, fairy tales, games, rhymes, musicality, the poet tries to set the balance right, to compensate for the tension created by conflicts, game-like, inviting us not to take anything for granted, but to question it, for there is always more, a plurality of meanings.

His poetry poses no finality, but a wandering for answers, a quest for true identity, no closure at all, but a continuous becoming. He has a postmodern approach of re-use and collage, of recycling elements of tradition in his poetry.

As we have seen, Cezar Baltag used fairy tales and folklore to enrich and give a distinctive flavour to his writings. Much used and abused, fairy tales remain a rich soil to be exploited.

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